

INFORMATION POINT A

Dyslexic Difficulties in the Workplace

Diana Bartlett

Dyslexia affects efficiency in many workplace tasks. The list below shows a range of difficulties which are commonly reported, though, of course, no individual dyslexic person will have *all* of them. Also noted are the strengths and talents that many dyslexic people possess.

Reading

- Reading and understanding written reports.
- Reading thick files of information.
- Reading at speed or under pressure.
- Following written instructions, for example, work procedures, or protocols.
- Reading out loud, for example, at meetings, or from PowerPoint presentations.

Writing

- Expressing ideas clearly and succinctly in writing.
- Producing written work quickly.
- Writing in an appropriate style.
- Writing coherent memos, letters, and reports.
- Using correct punctuation and spelling.
- Keeping a clear logical thread and structure in a piece of writing.
- Writing down messages.
- Taking notes in meetings.
- Filling in forms or work sheets.

Number Work

- Accurate copying of numbers in data entry.
- Writing down sequences of numbers, for example, account numbers.
- Understanding mathematical relations, for example, percentages.
- Recalling correct calculation formulae or procedures.
- Keeping track of numbers in complex tables.
- Avoiding over-checking.

Sequencing

- Filing documents/finding filed documents.
- Looking up entries in directories/dictionaries.
- Carrying out instructions in the correct order.
- Following work procedures.
- Prioritizing work.
- Structuring ideas in oral interactions.
- Carrying out tasks in an efficient, logical way.

Short-term Memory

- Remembering messages, instructions, and directions.
- Remembering telephone numbers.
- Recalling the content of written material.
- Following conversations, discussions, or talks.
- Formulating thoughts when speaking to others.
- Taking notes of meetings.
- Remembering people's names.
- Multi-tasking, for example, listening at the same time as taking notes.

Organizational Skills

- Poor time management.
- Inefficient work methods.
- Getting the times and places of meetings wrong.
- Missing appointments.
- Failing to prioritize.
- Failing to meet deadlines.
- Difficulty managing a varied workload.
- Difficulty carrying out complex work projects.
- Never having the right papers.
- Losing things.

- Having a chaotic workspace.
- Difficulty working under pressure.

Speaking and Listening Skills

- Interrupting in meetings, discussions, or conversations.
- Losing track of own thoughts and wandering off the point.
- Losing track of what other people are saying.
- Explaining things simply and clearly.
- Appearing abrupt or rude.

Hand-eye Coordination

- Slow and untidy handwriting.
- Poor presentation of written work or figures.
- Inaccurate keying on word processor, calculator, or telephone.
- General clumsiness or slowness.
- Difficulty with practical tasks, such as laboratory work.

Visuo-spatial Skills

- Confusing left and right.
- Having poor sense of direction.
- Getting lost in strange surroundings.
- Losing bearings in familiar places.
- Digesting information presented in visual form, for example, graphs, charts, tables of figures.
- Reading maps.

Concentration and Attention

- Focussing concentration for long periods.
- Focussing concentration when being given oral instructions.
- Maintaining concentration in conversations, meetings, or discussions.
- Susceptibility to distraction by background noise or activity.
- Losing place in a task.

Emotions

- Confusion and bewilderment.
- Embarrassment, shame, and guilt.
- Lack of confidence, low self-esteem, self-doubt.
- Lack of assertiveness.

- Defensiveness and evasion.
- Frustration and anger.
- Anxiety, stress, fear, and panic.
- Despondency, depression, and despair.

Positive Aspects

- Conscientiousness and determination.
- Holistic ways of dealing with tasks.
- Lateral thinking.
- Creativity and innovation.
- Awareness of links and associations which escape linear thinkers.
- Good powers of visualization.
- Good spatial and practical skills.
- Untaught intuitive understanding of how systems work.
- Good problem-solving skills.

INFORMATION POINT B

Reasonable Adjustments

Brian Hagan

What are Reasonable Adjustments and Who is Entitled to Them?

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) states that employers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled employees are not put at a substantial disadvantage by employment arrangements or any physical feature of the workplace. Dyslexia will usually be considered a disability for the purposes of the DDA.

Under the Act, it is unlawful for employers to discriminate against existing and potential employees, for a reason related to their disability, in all aspects of their employment.

What is Reasonable?

Clearly the requirements for reasonable adjustments will differ from case to case. In deciding what is reasonable, managers – and dyslexia consultants – will need to consider

- the size of the organization;
- the nature of the job;
- the individual's needs.

And whether the adjustments

- are practical;
- are excessively expensive – bearing in mind the size of the organization, the nature of its business, and its resources;
- will significantly reduce the disadvantage faced by the dyslexic employee;
- could cause serious disruption to other colleagues.

Ways in which an Organization can Support Dyslexic Employees

Dyslexia-friendly policies and practices need to be embedded in every aspect of an organization's policies. HR personnel and managers at all levels need to be given dyslexia awareness training so that they can effectively support dyslexic employees at all stages of their employment – in particular

- recruitment and selection;
- performance and appraisal;
- training and development.

Recruitment and selection

Employers should not use recruitment and selection methods which treat dyslexic candidates less favourably than non-dyslexic candidates. For example, it would be reasonable for an employer to

- assess only the knowledge, skills, and experience required for the effective performance of the job applied for – for example, written tests could be waived if writing were not a significant part of the job;
- assess the candidate in ways which are as close as possible to the circumstances of the job – for example, allowing applicants to use equipment or access databases that would be available to them if they were in the job;
- assess skills through observing and evaluating performance rather than asking for knowledge to be shown through written tests;

- if written tests have to be used, allow candidates extra time to complete them;
- consult with candidates about adjustments which will enable them to demonstrate their competences most effectively.

Performance and appraisal

In general, dyslexic people have problems with literacy skills, memory, organization, and communication. (See Information point A for a detailed description of dyslexic difficulties.) Performance problems caused by these difficulties often lead to a dyslexic employee being inappropriately accused of misconduct or incapacity. Managers, therefore, need to be aware of the sorts of errors which are caused by dyslexia, and to deal with these initially by offering reasonable adjustments rather than instigating inappropriate disciplinary proceedings.

As regards appraisal, managers should set realistic performance goals, and always be prepared to be flexible about setting targets. They need to offer dyslexic employees relevant training and to ensure that their working environment generally is dyslexia-friendly.

Training and development

Most dyslexic employees find that their difficulties often prevent them from benefiting from training courses. The following are recommendations for ways in which training can be made more dyslexia-friendly:

- Make available in advance the course timetable and session outlines so that potential areas of difficulty can be identified and discussed in advance with the training officers.
- Provide an overview of the course's learning objectives and session aims, so that trainees can do relevant preparation.
- Make available in advance any reading material that will be used during the training sessions.
- Provide clear notes/handouts as backup.
- Allow the trainee to record the sessions.
- Video-record demonstrations/training sessions.
- Allow the trainee to retain handouts, PowerPoint printouts, and demonstration materials after the session.

In general, trainers need to gain an understanding of the needs of dyslexic learners, and to modify course content, materials, and presentation accordingly. Wherever possible, material should be produced in PC-readable formats. It should be prepared in accordance with the British Dyslexia Association style guide (pages 19–23 in their Code of Practice for Employers), as this facilitates reading of text through the use of optimum text size, fonts, and background colours.

Where training involves work on PCs these should have screen, font, text size, and background colour modification facilities (e.g. Textic software), as these can significantly alleviate the difficulties many dyslexic employees experience with screen ‘glare’ and text distortions.

How Individual Managers can Help a Dyslexic Employee

A manager should identify a particular employee’s needs by arranging a Workplace Needs assessment. This will

- identify the nature of the employee’s difficulties;
- take account of job requirements;
- recommend appropriate reasonable adjustments.

In general, adjustments which an individual manager can usefully make are:

1. Arrange specialist workplace skills training to help the employee become more efficient in all the areas in which he/she experiences difficulty. (See Chapter 9 for detailed advice about a workplace skills programme.)
2. Arrange assistive technology support. (See Chapter 6 for detailed information about AT training and support.)
3. Take measures in the workplace which will be helpful to the employee, for example
 - assign tasks which are difficult for a dyslexic person to another employee, allowing the former to concentrate on tasks in which he/she is more proficient;
 - check back understanding of instructions in a way that engages the dyslexic employee;

- modify instructions or reference manuals to make them easier to read or follow;
 - give important instructions in accessible/audiovisual formats;
 - offer help with prioritizing and organizing workloads, for example, provide diagrams and flow charts rather than written schedules;
 - do not expect the employee to alternate at a moment's notice between work requiring sustained concentration and work requiring rapid and variable responses.
4. Be flexible in setting targets and avoid supervisory practices which are stressful for dyslexic employees, for example, asking them to perform tasks while being directly observed.
 5. Modify operational practices to deliver cost-effective help to the employee without disrupting overall work efficiency. This could include
 - providing an environment which allows dyslexic employees to focus and concentrate without interruption;
 - ensuring that customer-facing work is scheduled to avoid interrupting other work which needs sustained concentration.